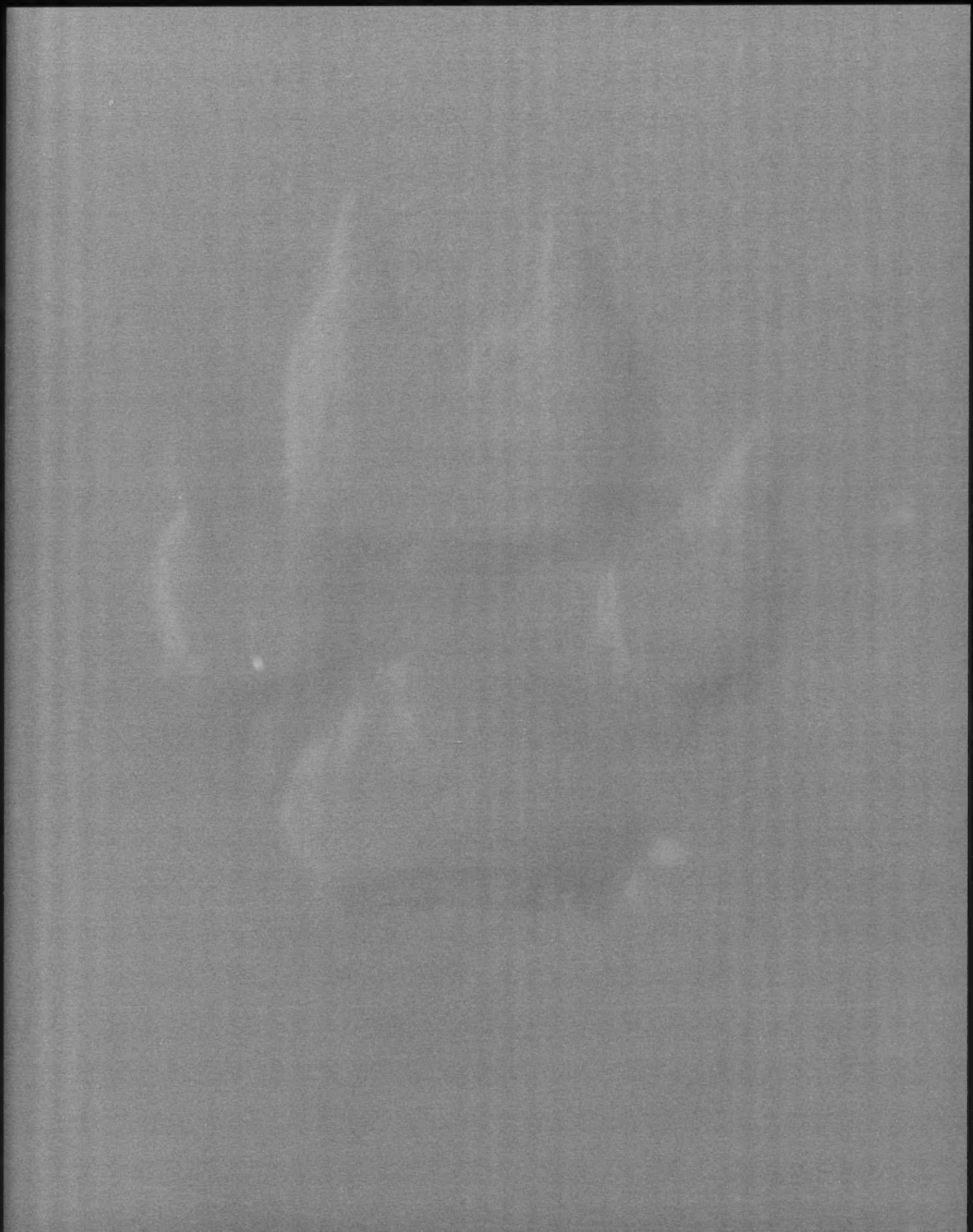
Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan

2012



Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan

Prepared by the Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee

2012

YUKON FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

Yukon Environment

Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan

As recommended by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board

Approved By

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April 20, 2012
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Disclaimer: This management plan shall not create any commitments or obligations that are legally binding on the planning participants or create or affect any legal rights of the planning participants. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, this management plan shall not create, affect, define, interpret or apply any roles, responsibilities, rights or interests under land claim agreements.

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Executive Summary

The *Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan* (2012; the "Plan") is intended to guide wolf conservation and management throughout Yukon.

A process to review the *1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan* (the "1992 Plan") began in July 2010. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon government established a six-person review committee consisting of an equal number of delegates from each party. The committee compiled, reviewed, and made publicly available considerable documentation on wolf conservation, status and management within Yukon and from neighbouring jurisdictions. It held public meetings in 14 Yukon communities and two workshops with First Nation governments and wildlife management boards and councils. They further solicited and received 42 written submissions. These meetings, submissions, and the documentation informed the recommendations of the committee.

The *1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan* was focused primarily on ungulate recovery and much emphasis was placed on large-scale, scientifically-based, government sponsored wolf control programs and the need

to research and test this methodology. Today, much has been learned about the impacts, long term effectiveness, and costs and benefits of this technique. There appears to be little interest from Yukoners and the general public to focus so much effort on this management approach. The 2012 Plan reflects a strong desire for a more complete range of tools to conserve and manage wolves.

The 2012 Plan also reflects new institutional arrangements established under the land claims agreements and proposes more flexible, diverse, and responsive approaches to wolf conservation and management. At the core of this new approach is a stronger role for local involvement in wolf management.

What has not changed since the 1992 Plan are peoples' attitudes and respect for wolves and recognition of their role in Yukon's ecosystems and in the maintenance of biodiversity.

Lessons learned

The science of wolf control through lethal and non-lethal measures has evolved significantly. Today, it is better understood that moose, the primary prey for wolves, naturally occur at low densities throughout Yukon and Alaska. Greatly reducing wolf numbers in defined areas did result in an increase in prey numbers. However it was believed that these prey densities would remain once wolf reduction stopped. This was not the case. It was recognized that to maintain elevated prey densities some level of predator reduction would have to be sustained.

Aerial control is no longer a recommended management tool. Strong public opposition, high financial costs, the short-term impacts on wolves and ungulates, and the lack of community involvement weigh against this approach. Other management tools with broader public support are recommended.

Management Framework

The Plan recognizes the diverse priorities, interests and concerns throughout Yukon for the conservation and management of wolves and prey species (notably ungulates). The Plan relies heavily on collaboration and communication between the Yukon government, First Nation governments, Inuvialuit, and wildlife management boards and councils to effectively implement many of its recommendations. At the same time, the Plan recognizes Yukon's international obligations as they apply to wolf management.

Wolf management goals

The Plan recommends seven management goals:

- Conserve wolf populations in recognition of the role of wolves in ecosystems and the maintenance of biodiversity.
- Manage the harvest of wolves in recognition of their social, cultural and economic importance to all Yukoners.
- Manage wolf populations in recognition of the enjoyment and appreciation that Yukoners and visitors have in experiencing wolves in Yukon wilderness.
- Use wolf harvest as a management tool to reduce predation rates of moose and caribou in local areas.
- Integrate ungulate management with wolf management goals.
- Manage wolves to address human-wildlife conflict.
- Promote research, education programs and information sharing to enhance understanding of wolf behaviour and ecology and management decisions affecting wolves.

The Plan proposes recommendations to achieve each of these goals that recognize the need for ongoing research and information sharing, the contribution that trapping could potentially make as a wolf management tool, the need to address wolf-human conflicts, and the importance of developing ungulate harvest management plans. The Plan also recommends developing materials and outreach programs to inform visitors and Yukoners about the status and importance of wolves. Equal consideration and the importance of local, traditional, and scientific knowledge is recognized throughout the Plan.

Overview

Purpose of this plan

This plan provides long term guidance on how wolf populations should be managed in Yukon. It provides principles and values to guide decision makers, and identifies specific goals. As in 1992, when the original *Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan* was developed, respect for wolves remains a strong value for Yukoners. Also, at the present time there are no conservation concerns for wolves in Yukon. Respecting First Nation and Inuvialuit Final Agreements, the Plan anticipates that Yukon government, First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, and mandated boards and councils will collaborate on wolf management and conservation activities.

The Management Plan Review

In July 2010, a review of the *1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan* was initiated by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) and the Yukon government. This review responded to the considerable interest by Renewable Resources Councils (RRCs) about wolf management.

The review was conducted by a six-person committee (made up of equal delegates of both parties) and followed an approved terms of reference. The public phase began with workshops in February 2011—one to engage boards and councils, and one to engage First Nation governments. After this, the review committee held public meetings in 14 Yukon communities.

The review committee advertised the meetings, and at the meetings comments from the floor and written submissions to the committee's website were encouraged. RRCs hosted and played an instrumental role in community engagement for most of these meetings.

After the three month public review, the committee considered what they heard, the written submissions, lessons learned about the effects of wolf management since 1992, current legislative and regulatory frameworks, and Yukon land claim agreements. This material was compiled in a separate addendum. This plan was then developed and submitted to the YFWMB and the Yukon government in July 2011.

The 1992 Plan and Wolf Management Today

As a result of developments in scientific knowledge and jurisdictional authorities, wolf management has changed considerably since the 1992 Plan was released.

The 1992 Plan was developed at a time when two large scale wolf reduction programs had just ended (Finlayson Lake caribou recovery program and Coast Mountain moose recovery program), and the Aishihik caribou recovery program was being contemplated.

In 1992 the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was recently ratified, the Umbrella Final Agreement was in the final stages of negotiations, and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement was well into implementation. Roles and responsibilities of First Nation governments and the Inuvialuit in managing wildlife, including wolves, would be redefined over subsequent years through these agreements.

Environment Yukon's Fish and Wildlife Branch had recently evolved from the Game Branch. The new branch developed a wildlife viewing program and staffed regional offices.

The science of wolf control was being tested in the early 1990s. Moose, the primary prey for wolves, occur at low densities throughout Yukon and Alaska. Studies had shown that substantially reducing wolf numbers would increase prey numbers. However, it was believed these higher prey densities would remain once wolf reduction stopped. This was not the case.

Given these changes, a new plan was needed to:

- Meet the requirements of Yukon land claim agreements, including the roles and responsibilities of First Nation governments and the Inuvialuit, boards and councils, and the use of local, traditional and scientific knowledge in wolf management;
- Reflect and balance the broad range of values for effective wolf management;
- Reflect the new understanding of predator-prey ecosystems, in particular the short-term effects of wolf reduction on prey populations and the resilience of wolves to these reductions;
- Establish wolf management programs that remove hindrances for individuals who want to hunt and trap wolves; and
- More closely link wolf management to the management of their primary prey species, moose and caribou.

The Management Context

Wolves in Yukon

Yukon government estimates there are 4,500 to 5,000 grey wolves in Yukon, spread throughout the territory. The population fluctuates but is generally considered stable and healthy. Yukon wolves are among the few worldwide that still live with other large predators and prey in a natural ecosystem. Wolves are opportunistic hunters and prey on moose, caribou, deer, elk, bison, muskoxen and sheep. Predation by wolves is an important factor in determining population dynamics of their ungulate prey. The diet of wolves also includes hares, foxes, beaver, muskrat and smaller rodents, as well as birds, their eggs, and fish.

Moose are at low densities in Yukon because they are part of a complex and dynamic multiple predator-prey ecosystem. In addition to wolves, other predators include grizzly bears, black bears and humans.

For millennia, wolves have played an important role in the culture of Yukon First Nations. There are stories which describe how wolves helped people long ago to find caribou, and how people learned from the wolf to be better hunters. There are many traditional stories that help convey this long standing relationship.

Yukon First Nations people harvested wolves for their fur. In the past some First Nation people removed pups from dens. The tradition of denning occurred in spring when people were on the land hunting beavers. Dens were located and all but two pups were removed. These traditional methods were believed to be effective at keeping wolf predation of ungulates balanced with human harvesting of the same prey species.

During the course of the review, this practice was raised numerous times. However there appears to be no overall support for using it today as a management tool. Rationale for this conclusion included limited interest in denning, challenge of locating wolf dens, the issue of pelt wastage, and the loss of income from handling and selling a mature wolf pelt.

Since 1992 wolf management in Yukon has been guided by the *Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan*. Today, wolves are managed as both a big game species and a furbearer. Hunting is permitted within a season and with bag limit restrictions. Trappers require a licence and are limited by seasons. Wolf pelts cannot be wasted. Over the last 20 years, on average, 155 wolves are trapped and 60 wolves are harvested by hunters in Yukon annually.

Wolves are capable of widespread, rapid dispersal with the ability for rapid breeding. Research has shown that a sustained harvest of 30% or greater is required to cause a decline in wolf populations. This resilience means they have the ability to 'bounce back' quickly if their populations are low. Currently wolves in Yukon are being harvested at roughly 2-3% annually. The current situation allows for flexibility in management, with no imminent threat of unsustainable harvest or loss of genetic diversity.

Management Regime

Governments

The Yukon *Wildlife Act* provides the Environment Minister with authority for managing wildlife and their habitats in Yukon, exclusive of National Parks and Reserves, and National Wildlife Areas. This ultimate jurisdiction is acknowledged in land claim agreements. These agreements define the authorities of First Nation governments, Inuvialuit, Yukon government, and mandated boards and councils to manage fish and wildlife.

First Nation governments may manage local populations of fish and wildlife on their settlement land to the extent that coordinating with other fish and wildlife programs is not considered necessary by the YFWMB. Beneficiaries of First Nations with Final Agreements have the right to harvest for subsistence in their traditional territory but must comply with the laws of general application when participating in resident or commercial harvest.

In areas where land claims have not been settled, First Nations have asserted Aboriginal rights, including the right to hunt, trap and fish for subsistence purposes. In these areas the Yukon government maintains jurisdiction for the management of wolves with recommendations from the YFWMB.

Territorial management of wolves

In Yukon First Nation Final Agreements the YFWMB is identified as the primary instrument of fish and wildlife management in Yukon. It is an advisory body which acts in the public interest and may make recommendations to the Minister, Yukon First Nation governments and RRCs on all matters related to the conservation[1] of fish and wildlife, including management plans. This authority includes species of territorial, national or international interest, such as wolves.

The YFWMB makes recommendations on territory wide licensed hunting regulations. The YFWMB also can advise on matters pertaining to subsistence hunting.

Local and regional management of wolves

In Yukon First Nation Final Agreements an RRC is established as the primary instrument for local renewable resources management in each First Nation traditional territory. They are advisory bodies that may make recommendations to the Minister, the affected First Nation, and the YFWMB on any matter related to conservation of wildlife, including fish and wildlife management plans. In areas of Yukon where the traditional territories of First Nations overlap each other, the roles and responsibilities of RRCs are suspended[2].

Commercial trapping is managed under a registered trapping concession (trapline) system that includes individually held traplines as well as group areas held collectively by many members.

RRCs advise the Minister and affected Yukon First Nations on the management of furbearers. This applies to the trapping of wolves and not the hunting of wolves and includes making recommendations on the use of traplines and the reassignment of all new, vacant and under-utilized traplines, pursuant to the criteria they establish.

The Agreements further recognize the need for the Board and RRCs to coordinate the management of fish and wildlife populations that cross a boundary of a National Park or National Wildlife Area.

The Yukon First Nations' Final Agreements Implementation Plans indicate that RRCs may establish bylaws under the Yukon *Wildlife Act* related to the management and use of furbearers in their area of jurisdiction. Examples of such bylaws may include the setting of seasons and bag limits, determining methods of harvest, and frequency of checking traps in accordance with the process established under Yukon First Nation Final Agreements and the related Implementation Plans. Currently the *Wildlife Act* does not include the legislative mechanism for such RRC-established bylaws; such interests could be addressed through regulation amendments. In establishing local criterion, RRCs are to consider the conservation of the fur resource and the enhancement of Yukon's fur industry.

The Tetlit Gwich'in have the exclusive right to harvest furbearers in the Primary Use Area (Fort McPherson group trapping area). When fish and wildlife matters are being considered in the Primary Use Area the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun nominated members of the Mayo District Renewable Resources Council are replaced with members of Tetlit Gwich'in.

On the Yukon North Slope, the Inuvialuit have the exclusive right to harvest furbearers. The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) (WMAC(NS)) was established under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and provides for joint planning by the Inuvialuit, the Yukon government and Parks Canada on the Yukon North Slope. The council advises the appropriate minister on all matters related to wildlife policy, and the management, regulation and administration of wildlife, habitat and harvesting.

The Porcupine Caribou Management Board (PCMB) is a joint management board established under the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement. It consists of eight members representing six signatories

[1] Conservation is a defined term in the Umbrella Final Agreement which guides all wildlife management in Yukon. In the Umbrella Final Agreement, "conservation" means the management of Fish and Wildlife populations and habitats and the regulation of users to ensure the quality, diversity and Long Term Optimum Productivity of Fish and Wildlife populations, with the primary goal of ensuring a sustainable harvest and its proper utilization. Similar definitions can be found in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement.

[2] Where no RRC is established, Yukon government will work with the affected First Nation on plan implementation.

(Government of Canada, Government of Yukon, Government of Northwest Territories, Inuvialuit Game Council, Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Council of Yukon First Nations). The PCMB may make recommendations to the Minister on any matter affecting the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat, including recommendations on predator management.

Recommended Implementation Measure 1:

Amend the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and regulations to enable Renewable Resources Councils' to establish bylaws in accordance with the process established under Yukon First Nation Final Agreements and the related Implementation Plans.

International obligations

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) regulates the international trade of wolves and wolf products. On behalf of the federal government, the Yukon government issues a CITES export permit for wolf products leaving the territory for other countries. A science-based assessment explaining that wolf harvest in Yukon is carefully managed and regulated, and the trade of wolf products will not compromise the survival of wolves in Yukon or Canada is sometimes required by an importing country. This is called a Non-Detrimental Finding, or NDF. Some provinces and territories are no longer issuing this CITES permit on behalf of the federal government. This has caused delays in permit issuance which can negatively affect some trappers and outfitters.

Recommended Implementation Measure 2:

Yukon government should retain responsibility for issuing Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) permits and input into and completion of Non-Detrimental Findings.

Principles

Work carried out to conserve and manage wolves in Yukon must:

- Respect wolves have existed in Yukon for thousands of years, they exist in healthy numbers today, and they should continue to exist in healthy and viable numbers in the future;
- Recognize the importance of wolves in the ecosystem and the value of wolves to humans;
- Recognize complexity of multiple prey-predator ecosystems and the challenges associated with managing these systems;
- Use a balanced approach to wolf conservation and management, employing a range of tools and avoid extreme management actions;
- Acknowledge the need for the Yukon government, First Nation governments, boards and councils to work together towards effective wolf management;
- Recognize that communities should play an important role in the management of wolves, including sharing local and traditional knowledge about wolves;
- Use the best available local, traditional, and scientific knowledge to achieve timely and adaptive responses to regional wolf management issues; and
- Use an adaptive approach to manage wolves in Yukon for the long term.

Management Goals

The following management goals reflect and further define the values around wolf management in Yukon. Identification of governments, boards and councils to carry out the recommendations is done with the best available knowledge of existing resources and responsibilities.

This is intended to be a broad based plan that does not limit the passage of regulations intended to achieve local management goals. Implementation of this plan may require amendments to the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and regulations. The context, rationale and challenges are discussed under each goal. Where activities or specific areas of work are described, the appropriate parties are identified.

In 1992 aerial control was used to reduce wolf numbers. Strong concerns from the public who did not support intensive aerial wolf control as a form of management were heard throughout the review. It does not engage communities, it is extremely costly to implement, and must be ongoing to be successful. Similarly surgical sterilization as a tool to limit wolf numbers was not supported. Many felt the procedure was disrespectful to the wolf.

Given this, aerial control of wolves is not a tool that would be recommended to meet management goals. The Minister, with input from the appropriate boards, councils, First Nations governments and/or the Inuvialuit, may still consider aerial control and other measures if circumstances warrant. The Minister's authority to respond to an emergency situation already exists under the Yukon *Wildlife Act*.

Goal 1: Conserve wolf populations in recognition of the role of wolves in ecosystems and the maintenance of biodiversity.

Wolves are considered an integral part of Yukon ecosystems. The role of wolves in shaping ecosystems is acknowledged, respected and highly valued by Yukoners. Although attempts may be made to reduce wolves in some parts of Yukon, it is understood that in most of the territory no management intervention is desired and the system is naturally self-regulating. Much work has been done in Yukon and other jurisdictions to better understand the role of wolves in ecosystems. However, there is still much to learn.

Informed management requires current information from all sources of knowledge. This knowledge must be well communicated.

Wolves are a wide-ranging species with home ranges covering many types of habitats. Most vulnerable are den sites which are known to be used for generations. During pup-rearing season, wolves tend to restrict their movements to dens and surrounding areas. Identification and protection of den sites through input to land use planning and environmental assessment processes will minimize disturbance to wolves when they are most vulnerable.

Recommended Implementation Measure 3:

Continue to collect and share traditional, local and scientific knowledge on wolf numbers, ecology, and predator-prey ecosystems in areas where there have been collaborative decisions about management priorities. Specifically, traditional and local knowledge should be gathered and shared. Scientific knowledge will continue to be gathered and needs to be communicated in plain language and should be made easily accessible.

Recommended Implementation Measure 4:

Provide input to land use planning and environmental assessment processes to protect known dens and mitigate disturbances to wolves during the period of pup rearing.

Goal 2: Manage the sustainable harvest of wolves in recognition of their social, cultural and economic importance to all Yukoners.

Wolves are listed as a furbearer and a big game animal under the Yukon *Wildlife Act*. Wolves can be harvested with a trapping licence or big game hunting licence. Licence holders must abide by the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and regulations.

Hunting and trapping are legitimate uses of a renewable resource that factor significantly in the economy, culture and lifestyle of many northerners. In addition to the economic contributions of resident hunters, big game outfitters offer wolf hunting opportunities to their clients. Trapping concession holders, in addition to trapping for themselves may provide non-trappers an opportunity to experience trapping under a guided trapping permit.

Harvesting wolves can be challenging. Significant time, effort and investment in equipment is required to catch wolves, and proper care of the pelt is labour-intensive. The low annual wolf harvest reflects this reality. Most trappers harvest wolves in addition to trapping other species. There are a few dedicated wolf trappers and outfitters that believe their efforts will increase moose and caribou numbers and enjoy the challenge of trapping this large carnivore.

Complicating wolf trapping further is the fact that there is limited access to traplines in Yukon. Many traplines are difficult and expensive to reach, expensive to maintain, the costs far exceed the returns, the trapping community is aging, and there is a low interest among youth to pursue this activity. As a result, many traplines in Yukon see little if any activity.

Many concerns were raised regarding the current regulatory framework for wolf hunting and trapping during the public review. This included hindrances pertaining to trapping opportunities, harvest reporting, harvest reporting date, sealing method and fee, bag limit, hunting and trapping season, training, cost and trapping methods. A desire for standardizing the rules and regulations for hunters and trappers was also raised repeatedly.

Access to wolf trapping opportunities

Access to trapping opportunities is a significant hindrance discussed at length during the public review. The registered trapping concession system is limited entry and demand for easily accessible traplines exceeds availability. There are individuals who are interested in trapping and have completed the training course, but have not been able to acquire a trapline or get permission to trap from a concession holder. RRCs review trapline use and make recommendations to Yukon government and First Nation governments on trapline assignment and re-assignment. Not all RRCs have developed trapline use guidelines to assist in fulfilling this responsibility.

Many individuals must rely on permission from the concession holder to trap. A lack of trust appears to be why some concession holders are unwilling to grant access. Despite recent changes to the *Wildlife Act* that now permit a concession holder to withdraw permission, there has been little increase in the number of individuals obtaining assistant trappers licences. Similarly proposals from individuals to trap only wolves have not given concession holders any degree of comfort.

Access to trapping opportunities remains a significant hindrance to interested persons that will require the good will of all parties, governments, the YFWMB and RRCs to resolve.

Recommended Implementation Measure 5:

To effectively implement many of the recommended implementation measures of this plan governments and the affected boards and councils must address the many issues related to access to traplines.

Wolf harvest reporting

Like all wildlife harvest reporting in Yukon, it is essential that wolf harvest is recorded and reporting methods are rigorous and verifiable. This helps to ensure the resource is managed in a sustainable manner across Yukon.

Recommended Implementation Measure 6:

Ensure accurate, timely, and verifiable wolf harvest information is collected in as consistent an approach as possible throughout Yukon.

Wolf harvest reporting date

Trappers are required to report their wolf harvest within 15 days after the close of the season. Hunters are required to report their wolf harvest 15 days after the end of the month. The inconsistent reporting times were identified as a concern during the review. There is a desire to establish consistent harvest reporting for hunters and trappers.

Recommended Implementation Measure 7:

Amend regulations for hunters and trappers to report wolf harvest within 15 days after the end of the hunting/trapping season.

Wolf sealing (identification) method

Currently pelts of harvested wolves must be submitted to a conservation officer for sealing with a metal tag. This requirement facilitates harvest reporting. In addition to seals there are other ways to document harvest. For example, moose and caribou hunters complete a mandatory kill report. Whatever method is used, it must ensure the harvest of a wolf is recorded in a timely fashion and not double-counted.

Recommended Implementation Measure 8:

If the marking of wolf pelts remains the key harvest reporting method, options that include a metal tag, tattoo or other tool should be explored. The YFWMB and RRCs can recommend to Yukon government the most appropriate form of identification. For administrative and enforcement purposes one common method throughout Yukon is best.

Wolf sealing fee

There is a $10 sealing fee charged for hunted wolves. In the 1992 lan, it was felt that since there is a tag and a fee required for hunting other big game animals, wolves deserved the same respect. However, unlike a moose tag, for example, which must be purchased before one goes hunting (i.e. expression of interest), a wolf tag is only required after an animal is killed (i.e record of harvest). It is also inconsistent that no fee is levied for seals affixed to wolves taken by trappers. There is further inconsistency in that no tag is required for coyotes, a species managed similarly to wolves (i.e. it is both a big game animal and a furbearer).

Recommended Implementation Measure 9:

Remove the sealing fee for wolves harvested by licensed hunters.

Bag limit for wolves

Currently there is a bag limit of seven wolves for resident hunters and two wolves for non-resident hunters. There is no limit or quota for trappers who harvest the majority of wolves. Harvest levels are well below sustainable limits and there is no conservation concern for wolves in Yukon at this time. Bison and elk harvest are currently managed under an adaptive management[3] framework enabling the Minister to adjust limits based on population size and hunter success. Establishment of a similar system for managing wolf harvest would enable the Minister to set bag limits for wolves, in consultation with First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, boards and councils and considering the following factors:

- Management purpose;
- Population status;
- Sustainable harvest;
- Conservation of wolf populations;
- Spatial scale;
- Hunter success rate;
- Public perception of soundness of management regime; and
- Importance of community engagement in wolf management.

Recommended Implementation Measure 10:

Amend regulations to enable the Minister to vary bag limits for wolves under an adaptive management framework.

[3] Adaptive management means applying past and current knowledge in a responsive and timely way, including in season changes, to improve management.

Wolf hunting and trapping season

The wolf trapping season extends from November 1 to March 31, the time of year when the pelts are most prime. The wolf hunting season extends from August 1 to March 31. This includes the regular hunting season, providing the opportunity to harvest wolves while hunting other big game.

The committee heard a strong interest in having a flexible season for both hunters and trappers to permit, for example, a longer season in north Yukon where pelts can reach prime conditions earlier than in the rest of Yukon and stay prime longer. The committee also heard the season should reflect access opportunities such as spring hunting in April.

Similar to the setting of bag limits, an adaptive management approach would enable the Minister to set seasons in consultation with First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, boards and councils. This would enable the RRCs the flexibility to make recommendations and consider changes to any established bylaws. Seasons must be closed during the birthing and rearing period. Yukon government and the YFWMB have an interest in, where possible, achieving consistency for administrative and enforcement purposes.

Recommended Implementation Measure 11:

Amend wolf trapping and hunting seasons in regulation to enable an adaptive approach to management. Seasons should be coordinated to the extent possible to facilitate enforcement, but must be closed during the birthing and rearing period.

Training for wolf trappers

Trappers are required to complete a trapper training course that is recognized by the Minister. Though the content is not described in regulations, the standard is a course currently offered by the Yukon government. There are concerns around the scheduling of and time commitment to take this course. As well, there are no wolf specific courses that qualify a person for a trapping licence. Shortening the time required for the course, offering wolf-specific training, utilizing local instructors, and providing the opportunity to challenge an exam may address these concerns.

Recommended Implementation Measure 12:

For the purposes of wolf trapping, replace the obligation to complete the current trapper training program with a program specific to trapping wolves. This program could consider separating mandatory (e.g. regulations and legal obligations) and optional (e.g. fur and pelt handling) training requirements. An option to allow for a person to challenge the exam should be considered. As well, the ability for a person to acquire a specific wolf-only trapping authorization should be provided.

Cost of trapping wolves

Cost is a significant hindrance to wolf trapping. Low fur prices over the last 25 years coupled with rising operating costs make trapping in general, and trapping wolves in particular, an expensive enterprise. The lack of fur harvest support programs and concerns that trapping as an industry is not supported by government like other resource use sectors (e.g. farming, forestry, fishing and mining) were heard frequently during the public review.

Wolf trapping methods

The need to continually seek improvements to trapping devices to ensure furbearers, like wolves, are trapped as humanely as possible was raised frequently during the review. Canada is a world leader in trap research with provincial/territorial governments as well as the federal government supporting the Fur Institute of Canada which carries out a comprehensive trap research and development program. Trapping methods in Yukon are regulated in accordance with recommendations coming from this national program.

Recommended Implementation Measure 13:

Yukon government should maintain its membership with the Fur Institute of Canada and continue to provide financial support to the national trap research program.

Recommended Implementation Measure 14:

Continue to promote more humane methods of wolf trapping through training and ensure regulations reflect best available technology.

Goal 3: Manage wolf populations in recognition of the enjoyment and appreciation that Yukoners and visitors have in experiencing wolves in Yukon wilderness.

Over the last 20 years, wilderness tourism has developed into an important industry in Yukon that capitalizes on the pristine wilderness and wildlife viewing opportunities. Opportunities to view wildlife in a wilderness setting are greatly appreciated by visitors and Yukoners alike. In particular, interest in hearing wolves, seeing their signs, and in having rare viewing opportunities is high.

The Yukon government wildlife viewing program works in collaboration with other governments, communities and others to support wildlife viewing, appreciation and economic diversity throughout Yukon. This program provides materials and information about wolves in their natural setting. Providing this material for recreationalists and other visitors helps to inform people about wolves in Yukon.

Recommended Implementation Measure 15:

Continue to incorporate opportunities in the Environment Yukon wildlife viewing program to learn about wolves and their ecological role, and provide outreach materials for use by the wilderness tourism industry and recreationalists.

Goal 4: Use wolf harvest as a management tool to reduce predation rates of moose and caribou in local areas.

Many Yukoners place considerable value in being able to hunt moose and caribou relatively close to where they live. They also appreciate the healthy lifestyle associated with hunting and eating wild game. As a result harvest pressure is greatest in these areas. Generally, when there is a need to reduce hunting pressure, ungulate harvest is managed through the limited entry permit system. Many communities expressed concern that this system is biased against local hunters by virtue of the fact the majority of those people licensed live in Whitehorse. Hence, strong sentiment was voiced by people to explore the trapping and hunting of wolves in and around communities to increase moose and caribou before harvest limitations are introduced.

In these local areas, targeting several wolf packs may allow hunters and trappers to hold wolf numbers below natural levels and result in an increase in moose and caribou numbers. Removing wolves in areas that are ecologically significant for moose (e.g. wintering areas) and caribou (e.g. calving areas) may be more effective than a broad, territory-wide approach.

The effectiveness of this approach to managing wolves, and the subsequent impact on moose and caribou, is not well known. Local and traditional knowledge suggests this is a feasible technique. There are hunters and trappers in Yukon who have targeted wolves in this manner and have seen resulting stability and even modest increases in local moose and caribou populations.

This type of approach engages the community. It may not be as effective as aerial control at removing wolves, but it has community support and will cost considerably less overall.

Many comments were made around the need for an incentive program to facilitate this type of program. Currently there are two wolf pelt handling incentives in Yukon that encourage trappers and hunters to do a better job of preparing the hide for market. Challenges with using incentives include inequity between trappers in program areas versus trappers

in other areas, the potential for people to submit their pelts more than once for the incentive, and the potential for having pelts from areas other than those targeted being submitted for the incentive.

The details of any local wolf harvest program to enhance moose and caribou numbers must include:

- Collaboration between Yukon government, First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, boards and councils, and others as appropriate on determining the program design, implementation and evaluation;
- In-kind and financial costs should be shared. Financial resources for wildlife programs are always limited and need to be allocated among many priorities. It may only be possible to fund a limited number of local wolf harvest programs;
- Local people – including trappers, hunters, outfitters and others – should be engaged in the implementation and evaluation of program activities. Engaging holders of multiple adjacent traplines would be ideal;
- The availability of reliable and verifiable harvest data for moose and caribou in the area;
- A harvest management plan for moose and caribou for all users; and
- The availability of reliable and verifiable reporting of wolf harvest in the program area.

Further, any local wolf harvest program should use the best available information and consider the following:

- Sustained success in any given area will lower the number of wolves, which increases the effort and expense of harvesting them;
- Use of skilled wolf trappers in priority areas;
- The difficulty and expense of monitoring wolf and ungulate numbers at a sub-population scale; and
- Recognition that wolves are not the only factor influencing ungulate populations, and that the success of the program will be affected by human harvest, habitat quality, weather, disturbance and other predation.

Tools that could be considered to implement a local wolf harvest program include:

- Establishing program area-specific bag limits and seasons;
- Establishing frequent reporting in program areas to monitor wolf harvest success to ensure the management objectives are met; and
- Amending the Yukon Wildlife Act to enable a person who locates a wolf from an aircraft to communicate directly or indirectly its location to another person hunting wolves within 48 hours of it being located.

It will be difficult to remove enough wolves to cause a decline the wolf population, and thereby increase moose and caribou numbers. The success of using hunting and trapping as tools to reduce wolf numbers hinges on providing access to traplines and removing hindrances identified in Goal 2.

The following two recommendations reflect the considerable discussion, interest and urgency shown throughout the process and are intended to effectively engage First Nation governments and communities that are interested in following through with a program.

Recommended Implementation Measure 16:

Subject to the criteria listed in Goal 4, collaboratively identify priority areas to manage wolves to increase moose and caribou numbers.

Recommended Implementation Measure 17:

Subject to the criteria listed in Goal 4, collaboratively develop and implement a study design in priority areas which considers local, traditional and scientific knowledge. A program evaluation should take place and determine the impact on wolves, moose and caribou.

Goal 5: Integrate ungulate management with wolf management goals.

Wolves need adequate prey species. Therefore, the needs of wolves must be considered when making management decisions for ungulates, in addition to human harvest. Managing ungulates in Yukon relies on having current local, traditional and scientific knowledge of population status and trends, a sound understanding of harvest and predation pressure, and understanding available habitat quantity and quality.

Complete, timely and verifiable harvest reporting of ungulate species is critical to understanding pressures on these populations. This requires reporting by all harvesters. With complete knowledge of harvesting pressure, guidelines can be developed that support harvest management goals and practices.

Finally, the impacts of land use and resource development – in particular increased access and subsequent increases in harvesting – alter ungulate numbers in previously inaccessible "reservoirs". Habitat loss, fragmentation and disturbance from industrial activities further affect ungulate populations. Land use planning and environmental assessment must weigh and consider these effects on ungulate population status and trends.

Recommended Implementation Measure 18·

Research and monitoring of ungulate populations in priority areas should be ongoing to provide information on status and trends.

Recommended Implementation Measure 19·

Develop collaborative harvest management plans that includes harvest reporting for all users for ungulates in accessible areas. These plans should reflect the best available knowledge on population status and trends, and consider the draft *Coordinated Harvest Monitoring Model for the Yukon* and the *Porcupine Caribou Herd Harvest Management Plan*.

Recommended Implementation Measure 20·

Recommendations to local and regional land use planning and environmental assessment processes must address the effects of access, the combined effects of multiple developments on ungulate populations, the identification, management and protection of important ungulate habitats, and goals of guiding ungulate management plans (e.g. federal management plan for Northern Mountain Caribou).

Goal 6: Manage wolves to address human-wildlife conflict.

Living with wolves and the associated risks is a reality of living in Yukon. This is especially true in rural communities and country residential areas. Wolves that have been conditioned to be near humans, pets and food can become aggressive and dangerous, particularly to livestock and pets.

Conservation officers follow an operational directive when responding to conflicts between wolves and humans where the first principle is to prevent conflicts through education, awareness and safe practices. It is recognized that sometimes conflicts are unavoidable. Protection of human life is the highest priority in these situations. Wild animals that have become a nuisance can sometimes be live-trapped and moved away from residential areas. When an animal acts aggressively or kills pets or livestock, it is often destroyed. In some communities better communication between conservation officers, the public, First Nation governments and the respective RRC is needed for timely and effective prevention of and responses to human-wolf conflicts.

In circumstances not contemplated by this plan, the Minister has authority to exercise powers in the event of an emergency, and will proceed accordingly.

Recommended Implementation Measure 21:

Working from the existing human-wildlife conflict directive, develop a protocol to address human-wolf conflicts that includes prevention, communication, protecting human life and property, and timeliness.

Recommended Implementation Measure 22:

The 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy should be reviewed to ensure steps are taken by livestock owners to protect livestock from wolf predation.

Goal 7: Promote research, education programs and information sharing to enhance understanding of wolf behaviour and ecology and management decisions affecting wolves.

Better balance the use of traditional, local and scientific knowledge.

For this plan to be successful, information sharing between local people, local organizations and governments needs to be improved. There is a need to share information to be more responsive to local situations like human-wolf conflicts and ungulate management situations.

In Yukon we are fortunate to have local, traditional and scientific knowledge to draw on to help solve wildlife management issues. There is a need to respect the unique nature of each form of information. Sharing this collective knowledge may assist in understanding the status of wolf and ungulate populations.

Recommended Implementation Measure 23.

Share collective local, traditional and scientific knowledge to be more responsive and address local wolf management issues.

Conflicts between concession holders and other land users.

It is important to reduce conflicts between trappers and other land users, including hunters, particularly near settled areas. The main concerns are from trappers who are having traps disturbed, and from other users concerned about accidental catching of dogs in trappers' sets. Concern was also expressed about some hunting practices (e.g. baiting) occurring near communities.

Environment Yukon and the Yukon Trappers Association had developed signs that communicated to other trail users that they were on an active trapper's trail. However, the program had questionable success and is no longer in effect.

Recommended Implementation Measure 24.

Develop and share information that leads to a better understanding of hunting and trapping as legitimate land uses. At times, this information even needs to be shared between hunters and trappers. For example, the conflicts that arise between bison/elk hunters and local area trappers.

Share information on the number of wolves trapped and hunted.

Sharing information on wolf harvest is an important component of wolf management. The annual Yukon Hunting Regulations Summary and Yukon Trapping Regulations Summary include a summary of big game animals harvested by licensed hunters. These summaries should include the number of wolves harvested, including those taken by trappers.

Recommended Implementation Measure 25.

To facilitate improved communication about wolf management, publish wolf hunting and trapping statistics in Yukon hunting and trapping regulations summaries.

Incorporate materials about on-the-land skills, trapping, the role of humans in ecosystems, the role of wolves in northern ecosystems and predator-prey interactions into educational curriculum in schools.

In the mid-1990s, an advisory group was formed to direct the development of learning resources on wolves in Yukon. The educational package, *Wolves: A Yukon Learning Resource*, was the result of this cooperative effort. At the time, Environment Yukon received many requests each year for school presentations on wolves. Also, following the development of the 1992 Plan and the launch of the Aishihik caribou recovery program, there was a need for more education about wolves.

Wolves: A Yukon Learning Resource is a package for use in classrooms with units and activities that are easily implemented within Yukon curriculum. The resource provides many opportunities to explore different perspectives of the biology and management of wolves. Given the new learning about wolves over the last 20 years, this resource should be revised and updated.

As well, there is a desire to enhance existing programs which teach young people skills for living off the land. School bison hunts were identified in several communities as an example of a successful program. Outdoor education and culture camps are further examples of providing students with hands-on experience.

Recommended Implementation Measure 26

Work with the Yukon government Department of Education to update and promote *Wolves: A Yukon Learning Resource*.

Recommended Implementation Measure 27

Work with the Yukon government Department of Education, First Nation governments and the Inuvialuit to develop experiential learning programs that teach wolf conservation and management and harvesting practices.

Implementation

To assist in plan implementation, ongoing collaboration and communication between the Yukon government, First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, and boards and councils with responsibilities for wolf conservation and management will be required.

The implementation measures of this plan should be reviewed with appropriate agencies five years after plan approval to determine if the overall goals and principles of this plan are being met.

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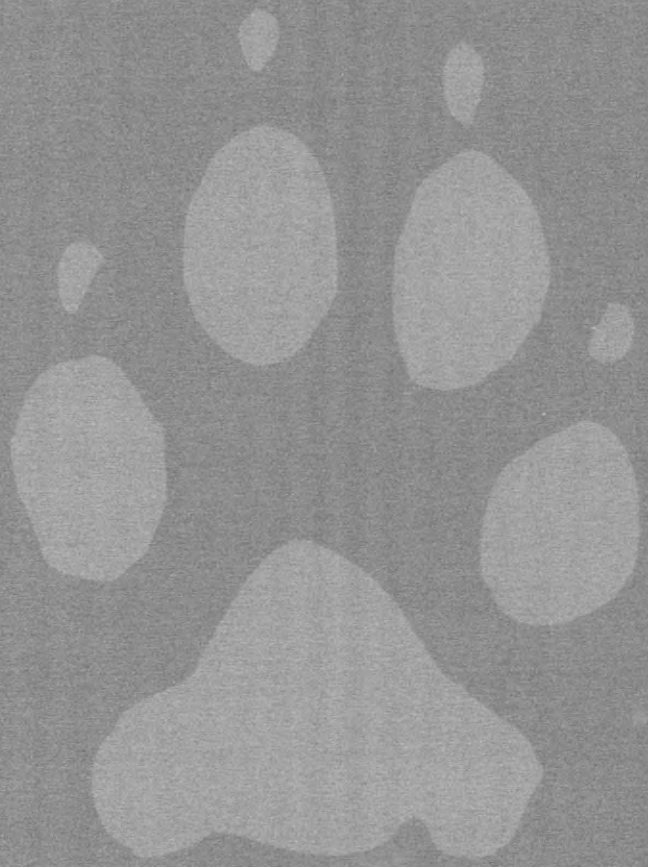

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